

Mission Possible

“Compelled by the Spirit!”

Acts 20:13-38

Last time, we landed the plane on Acts 20:1-12. That's where a teenager named Eutychus was listening to Paul preach on and on into the night. And this young man, Eutychus, was sitting in a window three stories high, fell asleep, tumbled out, and died. The church people ran downstairs and gathered around him praying, and then Paul prayed and God raised him from the dead. When God shows up, miracles happen, and people get saved. God was moving and working and the Church was growing and multiplying.

Now we're talking about the Spirit-life as compelled like that of a bondservant. The Holy Spirit unites with us when we are born again, and then comes to take up residence in us as we begin this journey of getting to know him. The Holy Spirit is a Person, by the way. He's not just a “force” - he's not an “it.” No, the Holy Spirit is a Person. He's either the first, second, or third Person of the Trinity. The Bible doesn't seem to give a hierarchy there. It's *God the Father, Jesus the Son*, and the Spirit that we call Holy - *the Holy Spirit*. He comes to take up residence in us.

The Holy Spirit *comforts* us. He *intercedes* through us. He *helps* us. The very word *Paraklétos* literally means the One called alongside to help. That's why we see it in some of our translations as *the Helper*, and so we're *compelled by* the Spirit. But we want to talk about what that means in the scriptures. So, Paul is on his third missionary journey. Some say there's three and some say there's four, because the fourth journey is actually the journey to Rome, and we see just the beginnings of that as we read the scriptures. At the end of the third journey, Paul is up around Assos and he's making his way back towards Jerusalem, because he said, “*I must go to Jerusalem.*”

What does that mean for *us*? The take-away is that the Holy Spirit who was in the Apostle Paul and that raised Jesus from the dead - that same power - or *dunamis* - of the Holy Spirit was what allowed Daniel to go down into a den of lions and stand there unafraid as the fearless warrior who was willing to defy the king. The same Holy Spirit worked through the boys Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they also defied the king's order to bow down before him.

Is there biblical precedent for civil disobedience? Yes. They defied the king's order, and they said, *"Whether he rescues us or not, here's what we know, we will not bow to you, O king."* There's biblical precedence for doing the right thing no matter what the world does. But it was the same Holy Spirit that energized them, empowered them, and made them brave. He gave them the courage they needed. They were *encouraged*, which means *to confer, to make courageous, or to impart courage*. That same Holy Spirit dwells in us if we have given our heart to Jesus Christ. If we said, *"Yes, I want him to be the Lord of my life. I want to be born again. I want to be saved. I followed him in believers baptism. Now I'm a son - I'm a daughter of the Most High God."* That makes us "the head and not the tail" according to Deuteronomy chapter 27.

When we align ourselves with God's Word, it's not bragging, it's simply declaring what God says about us and sees in us. So, we can say, *"I'm the head and not the tail. I'm above only and not beneath."* Why? - because we're a child of the Most High God. Our Daddy, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, is ours. He is *our* Father, *our* Abba, *our* Papa, and we are his sons and daughters. And if that's who we are, then the Holy Spirit - the same One that hovered over the waters in the beginning of Genesis and creation - *dwells in us*. You know what that makes us? - more powerful more than we know. That's where we're at and that's why this is so important.

Acts 20:13-38 NIV - Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

verse 13] *"We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot..."*

verse 20] *"You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house."*

verse 21] *"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."*

Even when I read that statement from him, it emboldens me. We need to be *bold* right now. For the first time in years, we're seeing a rise in people putting their trust in the local church again. Something's happening. Something's turning. Could we be in the foothills of revival? Could we be in the beginnings of a spiritual awakening, when Gen Z is now more awake than ever? They are the most conservative generation to ever come along in America. They're on fire for God, they're growing in their faith, and they're hungry. They don't want a "show." They want something real.

Our responsibility is as fathers and grandfathers in the faith - as mothers and grandmothers in the faith. These are our spiritual sons and daughters in the next generation. Our responsibility is to give them a demonstration of the power of God, not just *words* but *demonstrations of power*. We need to be able to speak the Truth. But, because we *love*, we also demonstrate this Spirit that is in us by being unafraid to pray, unafraid to believe, unafraid to speak out, and unafraid to speak up and to be counted. We need to show the next generation what *courage* looks like - and that's on *our* generation.

verse 22] *"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there."*

He got a "God tap." Something *in* him. He was being *compelled* by the Holy Spirit. This also happens to *us*. It happens to us standing in a line at a grocery store when we get this "God wink" or a "God tap" where we feel like we're supposed to say something to the person next to us, or we're supposed to engage the cashier who looks like they're having a horrible day. Could it be that we'll get a God-tap that says, *"Brighten - encourage her. Encourage him. Brighten their day. Bring some life. Light a candle. Let your light shine."* And those happen to all of us every day. But there are also other kinds that come along that are bigger in scope. I believe with all of my heart there are people in this congregation that are called to public office. You just may not know it yet.

Some of us *do* and we don't like hearing about this, but God's *goad*ing us. But we need to just say "Yes" and quit fighting it. The Bible calls it "kicking against the goads." A *goad* was a pointy stick that a rancher would use to drive his oxen down the road. He'd take that stick and poke the oxen with it - he would "goad" them along. And the Bible says, *"don't kick against the goads."* Could it be the Holy Spirit's goading us along and saying, *"You need to run for school board. You need to run for city council. You need to get involved in the committee that discusses the health curriculum in the schools. You need to get involved in that committee. Just show up. Half the battle is showing up."*

The reason Paul was compelled to go to Jerusalem was that he understood that he needed to get to *Rome*. Why would he want to go to Rome? - so he could preach the gospel to the emperor Nero. Rome was the power center of the world. The Holy Spirit was setting Paul up so that he would get there, and Paul *did* end up going to Rome, standing before the most powerful men in the world, and preaching the gospel. You can't make this stuff up. He couldn't design it that way. He was just compelled to follow the Lord in the next step to go to Jerusalem which was the *opposite* way of getting to Rome - *but he had to go to where God called him!*

What is God calling us to do right now that we've been saying "no" to? Maybe we haven't said it out loud, or maybe we're just ignoring it. Or maybe we're *overthinking* the voice of God and we need to just do it. The Holy Spirit may bring something to us and we tell him, *"I need to pray about it."* We get in the habit of saying that to people, *"Yeah, let me put that before the Lord."* The Holy Spirit gives us direction - he compels us and we say, *"I think I'm going to need to sit on that for a minute."* But Paul said, *"I'm going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen."*

verse 23] *"I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me."*

When Ananias laid hands on the Apostle Paul after he got knocked off his high horse, it says that things like great scales fell from Paul's eyes. Ananias prophesied over him that the Holy Spirit was telling him how much he must suffer for God's name's sake. That's repeated here as Paul says, *"In every city, the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me."* We've seen him go through that everywhere that he showed up and preached the gospel. Disruption happened. Do you know what should happen when we show up? - some kind of disruption.

It may be that you're disrupting the office flow and the office culture that's bent on telling really bad jokes and dark stuff - cutting up and berating the opposite sex and maybe even talking about their wives or talking about their husbands in a negative and disparaging way. And, we disrupt that just by *showing up*. Why? - because we're a carrier of the Holy Spirit. And wherever we go, there should be some kind of disruption until we come back to church. When we come together, the force of what happens here ought to carry us out through the week, and we just go disrupting everything that comes along.

We don't go in there to be abrasive or corrosive, but just by the presence of God in our life, we step into a space and something has to change - something has to *give* just because we walked in the room. Why? - because we're carrying the force of *heaven*. We're carrying the power of God in us. We are *carriers*. We are "infected" with the virus of the kingdom of God. And when we show up, it should wreck things, not in a negative way, but in a positive way.

verse 24] *"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me —the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."*

This is the great Apostle Paul saying that he was willing to die for what he believed in. He didn't know from city to city whether he was going to get stoned again. When he talks about running the race, he says, *"I just do one thing. I forget what lies behind me and I press on toward the high call of God in Christ Jesus. I go forward."* In the Book of Philippians, he says, *"I consider my life worth nothing to me. My only aim - my one thing - is to finish the race and complete the assignment the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. I have that one aim and that's all that matters to me, and I am determined to finish this race."* One thing - can we boil our walk with God down to *one thing* - our *one aim*?

Could it be the Holy Spirit's saying, *"You've got one job."* We need to know what that is, and we have to have the courage to ask the question, *"What is it exactly, Lord, that you want me to do?"* But then also to have the courage to hear the answer - to have the openness and the heart to say, *"I'm going to ask this question. It's going to be a tough one, but I'm going to ask God, what is it exactly that you want me to do? Not ten years from now, not fifteen, but what is needed now?"* We call that the *win* - W-I-N.

What is needed now? What is the one thing? What is our one aim? Paul understood his one aim. That's why he was so driven. - motivated - empowered - courageous - focused - mission-centric. *Why?* - because he had *one aim*. He had one job and he focused on *that* - the task of testifying of the good news of God's grace.

verse 25] *"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again."*

They loved him. He *planted* that church, and he's saying to all those elders who represented Ephesus and the other churches, *"You're never going to see me again."* How does he know that? - because in doing his one aim, he knows he's going to lay his life down and he was willing to do it. He was mirroring and shadowing and walking in the same steps as his Savior, Jesus. So he breaks this news - *"You'll never see me again."*

verse 26-29] *"Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock."*

In other words, they don't care. We have to understand that when God's working in a body like he's working in Bridge Church right now, there will be people that the enemy will send. Understand the dynamics here. We are in a spiritual war. The culture of this kingdom is warfare and we are *in* it. And to think that we can just do life and be-bop along and everything's going to be okay - well, I agree everything is going to be okay, but it will not be without us having to sometimes contend for the faith right in front of us.

Myself, Pastor Brian, and our team here all have a responsibility to guard the flock, and we watch and take note. When we see people that are divisive in nature and they come in and begin to to work their stuff, they don't last long. I'll just put it that way. Because we have to protect and answer to God, not you. I have to answer to God for this. And he's talking about that very thing - guarding - because these wolves will come in and will not spare the flock.

verse 30-32] *"Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."*

I've seen this in my forty two-plus years of ministry over and over again, and I've had to fight those wolves off in some of the various churches I've served. And it is *war* - so we should be on our guard.

verse 35] *"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

We have such a generous church, one of the most giving groups of people I've ever been around. And I mean that from my heart. I knew when news of the floods was happening and we were all getting that news in real-time and seeing the videos online, and on Facebook things were popping up - people were showing videos - I knew our church would step up to help people on the ground - boots on the ground - who were doing it. Thank you so much for your generosity. It is indeed more blessed to give than receive. Radical generosity has been forgotten in many arenas of the world, but not here. Not here.

verse 36,37] *"When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him."*

You know what that is? That's the power of community - people who genuinely love each other - who genuinely look past each other's warts, scars, mistakes, and weird personality quirks. In 1 Samuel, when Samuel the prophet was choosing who was going to succeed King Saul who had forfeited his anointing, he had to choose a successor, and they kept bringing out David's brothers - all of them were big warriors being paraded in front of Samuel, thinking maybe they would be a candidate for king. But Samuel said, *"No-no-no-no. You don't understand. God doesn't look on the outside. He doesn't look on outward appearance. He looks at the heart."* And he said, *"Is there someone that we've missed?"*

"Well, we've got David. He's kind of a half-son. He's he's sort-of a son. He's really become the stepchild of the family in a negative way. He's out there with the sheep." And Samuel said, *"Bring him to me."* And he anointed David as king when he was still a boy. Why? - because he wasn't looking at the outward appearance. He was looking at the inward appearance. God saw the heart. Don't ever think that you can't step into an arena and make a difference. Chris Hall was telling us about his battle when he was running for county commissioner and how people tried to dig up dirt on him and they just came after him because they didn't want to let go of such a powerful position in the county. He said, *"All we could do was get on our knees and say, 'God, this is bigger than us' and we realize it's bigger than us."*

But you know what? If God doesn't call us to something that's bigger than we are right now, then we don't need *faith* - we don't need *courage* - we don't need *wisdom*, if it's just something that we're comfortable doing. He might call us to do things in our wheelhouse, but more often than not, God calls us *outside* of our comfort zone. God will call us *into* something that's difficult. *"Let's do difficult...Let's do painful...Let's do what hurts...Let's do what costs us."*

He will call us into these arenas. It'll hurt. It'll cost something. It'll be difficult. But guess what? He'll *meet* us there, and he'll walk *with* us and he'll bring us *through* it. They knelt down. They prayed, and they all wept as they embraced him and kissed.

verse 38] *"What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."*

This grieved them the most because they knew that he was going to be killed. And guess what? He stood before Caesar. He preached the gospel in Rome. He went to Jerusalem, but he ended up going to *Rome*. He went the *long* way. He went the other way to get there, but he went God's way. What is God speaking to *your* heart? Are you compelled by the Spirit? If you're not, you need to ask the question, why not? Because probably at some point in your life - maybe you've been in faith a long time - at some point in your life, the Lord whispered something to you.

I wish I could learn to hear God's still small voice, but usually it's a cinder block on my head. You know what I'm saying? We can listen. We can say "Yes, Lord" before we even know what the question is and maybe *avoid* the cinder block - maybe avoid the two-by-four in the head where the Lord says, "*Finally, I have to get it to you because you're just not listening.*"

I've been practicing this for a while now where I get up in the morning and I say "Good morning, Holy Spirit. Good morning, Lord Jesus. Good morning, Abba Father." And the next thing I say is, "Yes, Lord." There hasn't been a question. There hasn't been an order there. I'm barely awake. I mean, I'm just coming out of the fog just like all of us. All I can think about is coffee. But the first thing is "Yes, Lord." And you know what that does and *is* doing for me right now? I'm super-excited about it. It's leading me into an adventurous life, because things will come up during the day and I'll go, "*This is that. I said 'Yes' to this already. This is that. This is what I said 'Yes' to.*" ...and God presents an opportunity as we make ourselves available.

Prayer

Father, would you compel us by your Holy Spirit to execute Your will, Your desire, and Your heart in us? Give us grace to make ourselves available to You and say, "Yes, Lord - now, what's the question?" We invite You into the battle with us. Lord, if You call us to jump into situations that might be uncomfortable, challenging, or scary, may we realize that You never call us to go alone, but You are going to go with us and before us. You are going to be our Rear Guard. We will never be afraid because the battle belongs to You. We love You and honor You. In Jesus' name. Amen